

Written Testimony of Candida Flores  
Connecticut State Legislature  
Appropriations Committee  
March 4, 2010

Honorable members of Ct. Legislature's Appropriations Committee:

My name is Candida Flores. I am the Executive Director of Family Life Education, Inc, a local human service organization that has been serving families in the Greater Hartford Area for 24 years. I am here to speak with you about the **Governor's proposal to eliminate all non-hospital based Nurturing Families Network home visiting programs in Hartford and New Haven.**

The Children's Trust Fund has provided funding for the Nurturing Families Network Program at Family Life Education for the past five years. The NFN program is designed to provide a system of continued care to promote positive parenting and reduce the incidence of child maltreatment. **On the governor's proposal, 8 organizations in Hartford will lose their NFN programs, where over 60% of poor children in the region live and 5 others in New Haven where 62% of poor children in that region live.**

In our organization alone, we will lose 7 positions and will have to subsidize from other funds 1.2 FTEs equivalent positions if we do not want to lay off additional staff who work in other programs. These employees are for the most part **single mothers** who have pulled themselves by their bootstraps, some of them former participants in our programs. They have been provided with intensive hours of training, which has made them extraordinary workers not only due to the training they receive, but also because of the life experiences they bring to the job. They are just a paycheck away from becoming clients or becoming another statistic.

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The governor's recommendation will just get them there faster. Between the 13 organizations losing the NFN program, there are over 50 staff directly affected, meaning they will lose their jobs, by the governor's proposal and possibly several others who will be indirectly affected..

The state issues contracts to organizations in the community, such as FLE, to help you save families and to prevent children from potential abuse and neglect. These contracts most of the time barely provide us with the essential, basic resources to operate. The community organizations running these programs are required to match a percentage of the funds provided. In other words, these contracts cost our organizations money. I say this so that you understand that I am not here to advocate for Family Life, I am here to tell you that taking away from families who have nothing, it is not an option, and WILL NOT balance the budget. You are also throwing out of balance a number of organizations that are already making ends meet. Most of us have exhausted our creativity and cannot come up with many more options to continue to serve the ever-growing needs of the people we serve.

Children's Trust Fund has proven to work and to change and improve outcomes for parents and children. For three years in a row, we have come in front of you to testify against the elimination of these programs which are targeted for

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elimination year after year. This situation creates lot of apprehension among our program participants as well as staff.

The decision to eliminate the community-based component of this program to save approximately 3 million dollars is not only NOT fiscally sound, but it is inhumane. The people who are going to be more directly affected by these cuts are the ones who already have given up more than they can. For some of these families NFN is the light at the end of the tunnel. They see in the home visitors a helping hand that is there for them when they need it the most. For some of these children the home visitors become their life line. The families we work with trust us, they open the door to our home visitors because they know that we are there to help and not to be punitive.

It is true that you must make cuts in order to balance the budget, but look for things that do not work. The NFN program is modeled after a national initiative that is based on results and accountability. The data collected through the years do not lie. We want to get to these families before they become another statistic.

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Study after study show that there is a direct correlation between childhood trauma and adult health and mental health issues such as depression, pedophilia, alcoholism and other drug abuse issues, domestic violence, and the incidence of crime. "Saving" 3 million dollars today will cost the state and society in general a lot more in the end.